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SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA AND DRL/NESCA
NSC FOR KUMAR

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KDEM EG
SUBJECT: MB PARLIAMENTARY LEADER ON INCREASED GOE
PRE-ELECTION PRESSURE

REF: A. CAIRO 1467
1B. CAIRO 1393
1C. CAIRO 1148
1D. CAIRO 597
1E. CAIRO 328
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Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. KEY POINTS

-- (S) Muslim Brotherhood (MB) MP and leader of the MB bloc in the People's Assembly (PA) Dr. Mohammed Saad Katatni said pressure on the MB has increased in the lead-up to the 2010 parliamentary elections, and is greater than before the 2005 and 2008 elections. He called the recent detention of MB Guidance Council members part of an effort to sideline the MB before a presidential transition.

-- (S) Katatni denied press reports of a deal where the MB would not participate in the 2010 elections in exchange for the release of recently arrested members. The MB continues its election preparations, including selecting candidates to run for the new seats allocated for women.

-- (S) Katatni offered no new insights on who would be the new MB Supreme Guide following internal elections in December 2009, but said he expected the MB would change little as a result.

12. (S) Comment: Katatni's remarks track from various official MB spokesmen public statements. GOE pressure on the MB continues to mount, and may increase as elections draw closer. His insights on MB views on key legislation are interesting but unlikely to influence its passage. Despite the fact that Katatni himself is named by the GoE in the documents used to arrest his fellow members of the Guidance Council, he appeared relaxed when discussing the accusations against him. His comment that the GOE is putting economic pressure on the MB tracks with what we heard in mid-July from a businessman-NGO director in the Delta city of Mansoura (ref B). End comment.

13. (S) PolOff met on July 29 with Dr. Mohammed Saad Katatni, an independent member of parliament affiliated with the MB who is the leader of the 86 member MB bloc in the People's Assembly (PA), Egypt's lower house of parliament. Katatni defined the current political environment as "difficult." According to Katatni, in the lead-up to the 2010 parliamentary and 2011 presidential elections the GoE is using a variety of tactics, including economic pressure, to "contain" the MB. He added that the GoE's effort to curtail MB activities was stronger now than it had been before the 2005 parliamentary elections and the 2008 local council elections. Katatni cited two specific reasons for the

increased pressure: differences of opinion on Egypt's role in the Gaza crisis, and the government's desire to wipe out any opposition in the lead-up to presidential transition. According to Katatni, the GoE exaggerates the threat MB poses. "We differ from the regime but we still love Egypt. We also prefer stability," he said. (Note: Poloff called on Katatni in course of her introductory rounds with key members of Parliament. The office call was the first one-on-one exchange with an Embassy officer in many months. End note.)

¶4. (S) Katatni called the recent detentions of Guidance Council members (ref A) part of the ongoing clampdown on the MB. Katatni, himself a member of the Guidance Council (ref G), said the accusations of money laundering had become commonplace and that there was no evidence to support them. Katatni's name is mentioned in the "investigation memo" that outlines the accusations, though his status as an MP gives him immunity from prosecution. In Katatni's view, the GoE goal is to keep MB leaders in jail until the elections are over. Katatni strongly refuted press reports of a deal between the MB and the GoE where the MB would commit to curtail its election participation in exchange for the release of its recently detained leaders. This follows similar denials in the press by the MB Supreme Guide Mehdi Akef.

¶5. (S) Katatni said that, despite these circumstances, the MB plans to field candidates for the parliamentary elections, including candidates for the 64 seats newly created in the PA for women (ref C). He could not say how many candidates the MB would field, nor how many constituencies they expect to run in. Those decisions, he said, would "depend" on how the

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situation develops in the coming months. Katatni confirmed the MB will continue to postpone the release of its party platform, believing that its publication would be viewed as a provocation. In February 2009, MB Supreme Guide Mehdi Akef announced he would "indefinitely postpone" finalizing the controversial draft document (ref E). Originally leaked to the media in September 2007, two recommendations prompted public criticism from outside the MB as well as within. The first was the creation of a "Senior Religious Scholars Group" that would review draft legislation and the second a prohibition of a woman or Copt as president. Katatni also denied any internal rift within the MB, which some observers believed the publically-airied internal criticism on the platform had implied. He did say that the draft platform had been revised and that "some" of the controversial elements were removed.

¶6. (S) In his role as leader of the MB bloc in parliament, Katatni said the MB had a broad legislative agenda, but he complained that MB-affiliated "independent" parliamentarians faced several roadblocks. Katatni cited as an example his submission of draft legislation on political party registration which would eliminate an NDP controlled committee that, along with a judge, currently approves new applications. In Katatni's view, the judge's ruling is sufficient to determine the legality of any given application. After two years, Katatni's bill has not been moved to the relevant committee for formal review. (Comment: We do not expect the GOE will allow the bill to move forward. End comment.)

¶7. (S) Commenting on other key legislation expected to be on the PA's agenda in November session, Katatni called the draft counterterrorism law, which would replace the Emergency Law, a "government project" and said he had not yet seen a draft. The MB believes that Egypt's Criminal Code is sufficient and neither an emergency law or a counter-terrorism law is required. On a draft comprehensive law on the construction and repair of places of worship, Katatni suggested that the constitution secured the right to worship freely. His concern about the new legislation was that it would somehow further restrict the right to assembly. According to

Katatni, the MB now does most of its organizing in mosques because it was never given the required permission to hold public gatherings elsewhere. (Comment: His link between the new law and further restrictions on religious gatherings is not clear. End comment.)

¶ 8. (S) Katatni also outlined the internal process to select a new MB Supreme Guide to replace Mehdi Akef, who announced his retirement earlier this year (ref D). The MB's Shura Council consisting of 75 elected and 15 appointed members will elect one of its own as the new Guide in late December 2009. The 75 elected members represent the various governorates and are elected locally. Numbers of representatives depend upon the number of MB members in each governorate. Katatni was unwilling to name any leading candidates. He did say that he did not expect a major change in the direction the MB would take under a new Supreme Guide. Specifically, some have speculated that if the MB elects a member of the conservative trend, the MB will turn away from politics and return to a more traditional religious "dawa" role. Katatni said the two, religious activity and political engagement, would remain as parallel tracks.

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